

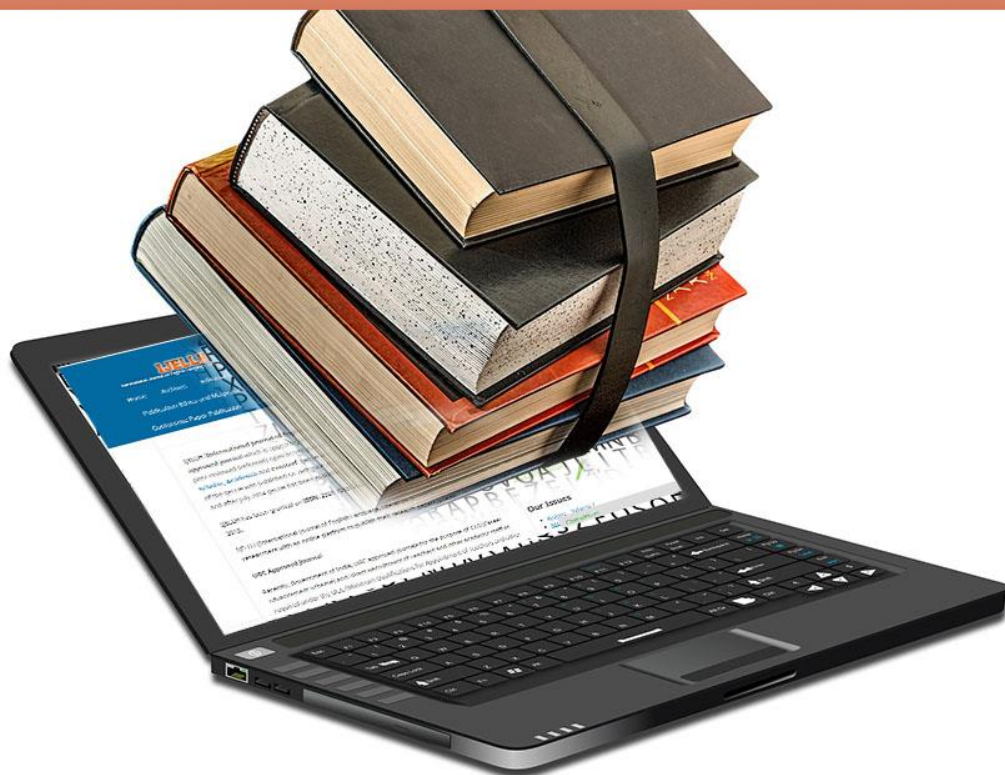
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Presentation of Female eroticism in Girish Karnad's *Bali : The Sacrifice***Abstract**

The play foregrounds the problematic issue like a woman's reclamation of her exquisite female identity through her extra-marital affair. The play debates over the notion and the act of violence. Like most other plays Karnad too introduces the theme of incompleteness of a man. A man is never complete as the ideal form of combination of the body and the mind, the beauty and the instinct and so on. So the Queen's search for a complete man brings her ultimately to an "ugly man", who brings her "fulfillment".

Karnad's popular play *Bali : The Sacrifice*, which is mainly based on the dialectics on non-violence, also unravels the issue of female eroticism. The play foregrounds the problematic issue like a woman's reclamation of her exquisite female identity through her extra-marital affair. The play debates over the notion and the act of violence. It debates the Jain notion that the intention of violence is as condemnable as the action itself. And through this debate over the Jain ideology Karnad prides open the scope for another latent debate on adultery. About the presentation of the issue of non-violence in *Bali : The Sacrifice*, Karnad had said in an "Interview":

It is a discussion play that interrogates the notion of violence . . . It deals with the

idea that violence is pervasive, lying just beneath the surface of our everyday

behaviour and is often masked by a conscious effort. It also posits that human

thought, intention and action are all interlinked. It debates the Jain notion that

intended violence is as condemnable as the action itself. The mere thought of

bloodshed or brutality can condemn one as much as the deed would. The play debates the conflict of faith.(49)

And through this debate over the Jain ideology Karnad prides open the scope for another latent debate on adultery. Through this play the playwright throws open the question to his readers whether the thought of adultery is as condemnable as the act . When Karnad was interrogated about the candid expression of female physicality and extramarital affair within the traditional Indian paradigm in his plays, he commented :

I used to know a married woman once who positively blossomed after she had an extra-marital affair. If womanhood finds fulfillment in love that happens to be outside marriage, why should that be considered wrong? Radha's love for Krishna was such. . .(43)

Karnad here actually wants to inscribe the imprints of the female pleasure and female desire, which is characteristically different in the persons of the opposite sex. In this context Helene Cixous has written in her "Conversations" :

I don't believe a man and woman are identical. The fact that men and women have the whole of humanity in common and that at the same time there is something slightly different, I consider a benediction. Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories. The way we make love – because it isn't the same –

produces different sensations and recollections. And these are transmitted through the text. . . (230)

The play opens in medias res with the characters of the Mahout, restrains the Queen from deserting him after spending their time together and insists on knowing her name :

Mahout: A name. Any name would have done. . . I am ugly. Ugly as a bandicoot. I know. But I've had women. Plenty. When I've wanted a woman – needed a woman . . . After all, it's a matter of courtesy, isn't it? A mere . . . formality. You can't just sleep with a woman and let her go – just like that . . .(75)

Like most other plays Karnad too introduces the theme of incompleteness of a man. A man is never complete as the ideal form of combination of the body and the mind, the beauty and the instinct and so on. So the Queen's search for a complete man brings her ultimately to an "ugly man", who brings her "fulfillment". So when the Mahout repeatedly laments pointing to his ugly shape, the Queen says:

I won't say it . . . If you mean you are not tall and fair with an aquiline nose and ruby lips – I live surrounded by such men and I am sick and tired of them.(77)

Karnad thus artistically manifests the woman's search for fulfillment of her self through her partner. This quest is also symbolic here as a pursuit for a woman's individuality, subjectivity and identity. As their conversation proceeds Mahout repeatedly stresses on the fact of the Queen's sense of frustration and loneliness within the wedlock , that has driven her here to commit adultery :

Mahout: Look, I am a low-caste mahout, the king's elephant-keeper. And you?

I am probably bleeding all over. There. You've almost scratched my skin off.

Such long nails. You are no bazaar woman, I can see that. . . I like everything about bed. Everything. That's why I am good. I am good. Aren't I? Better than your husband?

Queen: How dare you! He is the best of men.

Mahout: Maybe. But what about in bed?

Queen: There too.

Mahout: Then why are you here? . . .(79)

Thus, Karnad here brilliantly introduces the issue of female desire and physicality from a realistic stance. Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*:

It is not admitted that she, like a man, can have desires of her own: she is the prey of desire. It is understood that man has made the specific forces a part of his personality, whereas woman is the slave of the species.(699)

But going against such traditional viewpoint of the androcentric literary discourse Karnad too like a feminist writer succeeds in presenting the female voice as well as the female desire as the central issue in his text.

But ultimately the Queen discovers her worth to either her husband or to the outlawed lover as nothing more than the "flesh" or an object. She is taken aback by hearing the conversation of both of her partners :

Mahout: . . . I mean, a woman slips but it doesn't have to be for the

worse . . . Now there's a thing or two I've noticed about your queen.

King: You have? What kind of thing?

Mahout: Touch her here on her right shoulder. Rub gently. And you'll see

for yourself what happens.

Queen : Enough, sir. . .

King: The right shoulder! . . . I knew that sometimes caressing and pressing her

down here - near the hips – that worked like magic. But the right shoulder

thing is new to me. . . Any other – shall I say, vulnerable – spots,

would you say? Erogenous?

Queen : Don't you dare. I am not a piece of meat for you to pick and paw

it.(116-17)

Karnad here manifests Queen's frustration for being vivisected in this way by her lawful husband as well as outlawed lover. She understands that at the end of all she is nothing but an fleshy object of desire to both of them. Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*:

Woman is shown to us as enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play

at being a man will be for her a source of frustration; but to play at being a woman

is also a delusion: to be a woman would mean to be the object, the Other . . .(82-83)

Karnad too here projects a woman's sense of despair for being regarded as an object, who has only her flesh but no mind. It becomes a way of denying her subjectivity as well as identity.

But the female protagonist reclaims her lost identity by re-discovering her desires through her extra-marital relation with the Mahout. The Queen is humiliated when the fact of her adultery is known by her husband and mother-in-law. She is abused for the deed. Yet she feels to be proud for the fulfillment of her entity by gathering a total, aesthetic experience of life from the unknown Mahout. Hence she utters to her husband:

. . . I feel fuller. Richer. Warmer. But not ashamed. Because I didn't planned it.

It happened. And it was beautiful. . . (119)

The feminist critic John Richetti, while interpreting such cases of reclamation of identity of the female protagonists of the eighteenth century fiction by the women writers, comments in *Popular Fiction before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739* :

The heroines of all these novels are the victims of a world which sees them simply as opportunities for lust and avarice, which depersonalises them, in modern jargon. The love by which they are possessed is represented as tragic, since it most often leads to tragedy or at least to severe hardships. But the love which destroys them is really a way for these heroines to assert personality, a desperate alternative to the depersonalization which the masculine world imposes upon them. (208)

The same idea is also applicable in the context of the adulterous Queen of the play. In spite of belonging to the traditional socio-cultural model of the Indian society, Karnad is able to offer

here the new concept of identity through the character of his female protagonist. Karnad is also notable here for articulating such characteristic features of distinct female eroticism in this text. Helene Cixous writes in “Conversations”:

. . . I believe there is a bodily relationship between reader and text. We work very close to the text, as close to the body of the text as possible; . . . We work on the mystery of human being, including the fact that humans are sexed beings, that there is sexual difference, and that these differences manifest themselves in texts. The differences inscribe themselves in whatever is born from us. . .

I don't believe that a man and a woman are identical. The fact that men and women have the whole of humanity in common and that at the same time there is something slightly different, I consider a benediction. Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories. The way we make love – because it isn't the same – produces different sensations and recollections. And these are transmitted through the text. . .

Similarly this text also inscribes the “different” story of female pleasure as well as desire, which are always denied in the patriarchal society. In spite of belonging to the traditional socio-cultural model of the Indian society, Karnad is notable here for his valiant assertion of to offer here the female identity and female eroticism through the character of his female protagonist.

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